PREMIERE EDITION

MATWATCH

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PREMIERE EDITION

This is the premiere, the debut, put-up-or-shut-up time. For those of you who don't know me, I work in academic communications at Auburn University. At this moment, I'm concluding a year-long work tracing the history of pro wrestling on television. And I'll confess to being a 23-year fan of one of the most loved, hated and misunderstood elements of American entertainment.

I've experienced the evolution from what insiders call "mark" to a local promotion ring announcer to television commentator to academic reviewer of the ring. Like many of you, I have seen things happen these last five years I never thought I would see. I'm happy pro-wrestling is open to mainstream America on a national basis, though most of us realize the sport has always enjoyed a strong, if fractionalized, popularity. I am enough of a purist to detest some of the cartoon nature of the ring now, though I am an admirer of Vince McMahon for his marketing and merchandising innovations.

This newsletter will not attempt to be an all things to all people bulletin. We can't. I'm professionally employed by an institution which keeps me from spending all my waking hours concentrating on wrestling.

What we WILL do is give you as thorough as possible week-to-week view of the television side of pro wrestling, cover major breaking stories, and take a critical look at how various promotions use television---offering whatever insights we can as to whether a promotion is responsible in its presentation to you, the fan, and if it is making the most effective use of its production, talent and commentators.

A regular feature will be REMEMBER WHEN?.... For you under the age of 20, we will hopefully enlighten you as to how past feuds heightened through TV, along with some of the most memorable turns, sell jobs and interviews in television wrestling history. For you veteran fans, I hope this is a hint of nostalgia.

Hopefully, we'll have a sense of humor. In its effort to be too exaggerated and in the exorbitantly competitive nature of today's promotions, I feel wrestling has lost much of its natural humor and I hope we can contribute to the lighter side.

Once we get going, we do intend to solicit your letters. I want this to be a paper you can contribute to... but I am not interested in fan mail gushings or personal attacks on other letter-writers. I want serious open opinions on the TV wrestling shows you watch.

Weekly, we'll take a USA TODAY-approach in our TEMPO review of the week's TV shows with segments of LINES OF THE WEEK, BEST PICTURES, STRONGEST COMMENTS, WORST INTERVIEW, BLOOPER AWARD, DREADED GLITCH and the ever-present BOO AWARD OF THE WEEK.

When and if we can get interviews with people within the industry, we will present them. As you well know, in a closed business, most people willing to share information cannot be quoted by name. But whenever possible, we will try to offer you personal insights into the people within the wrestling business and key issues facing them.

Most of all, this effort is a true joy for me and I hope you'll be willing to come along with us for the ride. You'll find a subscription form elsewhere in this complimentary first issue. All we ask is that you give us a chance....and participate with us. Hopefully, you won't be disappointed.

Steve Beverly

STEVE'S SIDELIGHTS

ATLANTA---Well, fellows, let's take you to about 7:00 Saturday night at WATL, Channel 36, in Atlanta. Richard Hyatt, columnist for the Columbus Ledger-Enquirer (and known in some circles as Missy's brother); wrestling aficionado John Hamilton and I made the journey for Joe Pedicino's third annual WRESTLETHON, this year to raise money for bullet-proof vests for the Atlanta Police Department.

Friday night, the marathon began with WATL's Friday night lineup, which includes late-night POWW and AWA shows. Joe did a cut-in on the Fox Network LATE SHOW at 11:00 and was about to introduce rookie Joey Maggs to the national audience when Hot Stuff Eddie Gilbert blindsides Maggs and just destroys the kid. Paul E. Dangerously comes out and goes into his maniacal routine and the thing would have been great except LATE SHOW host Ross Shaffer (in L. A.) apparently wasn't clued into the angle and kept trying to interrupt Joe's narration... and the L. A. studio audience was too distracted to get the thing over.

Anyway, on his Friday night wraparounds, Joe and Boni Blackstone admonished Gilbert and Dangerously for how "badly you embarrassed me (Pedicino), Channel 36, and all of Atlanta for what you did on the LATE SHOW." Several times Saturday (the marathon resumed at 10:30 a. m. Saturday morning and continued through the evening), the Fox angle was replayed to milk the hype for Saturday night's live card in the new WATL studio.

Joe repeated his two-hour HISTORY OF PRO WRESTLING IN ATLANTA documentary from 5:30 to 7:30, which ironically included several interviews with Jim Crockett, who had a big falling out with Joe last summer and refuses him NWA clips for PRO WRESTLING THIS WEEK. He then added a half-hour of live and taped material to the doc (which was produced two years ago) as the live audience entered for the 8-10 p. m. live show.

Channel 36 moved into plush multimillion dollar new quarters last September. With Joe's Saturday night wrestling shows the top-rated offerings on WATL, he was able to wangle a studio large enough to host live wrestling.

The live show was billed as the first live TV wrestling show to originate from Atlanta in more than 20 years and that's accurate. The old LIVE ATLANTA WRESTLING on Channel 11 switched to tape in 1968.

The card was made up of mostly Southern Championship Wrestling guys, a couple of AWA wrestlers and the big guest, Eddie Gilbert, from Continental---along with Dangerously and Missy Hyatt. It was worth the 100-mile trip just to see Missy. Richard Hyatt, who knew color commentator Rhubarb Jones from years past, wanted Rhubarb to tell Missy her long-lost brother had returned for a reunion with her, but Rhubarb didn't buy it for an instant. The only no-show on the card was Ted Oates and nobody missed him. He was scheduled against Dick Slater at the end of the first hour but the match was scuttled.

Joe was able to pull off a nice, small-scale version of a WWF show with Rick Stewart doing interviews in both dressing rooms. Let's run down the matches:

1. BRAD & BART BATTEN vs. STEVE PRITCHARD and GERALD "HOT ROD" FINLEY. The Batten twins are in as heels after about a three-month hiatus from their last appearance in Central States. They're working hard to get over. Brad started a furor with the crowd early and told Pritchard and Finley, "Hope you guys ate your Wheaties today because you're gonna need 'em!" The Battens worked fairly well---though not nearly on a level of a Fantastics-Midnight Express-RPMs level. Finley never came in until 7:00 and was pinned at 7:35 when the ref was distracted and the Battens did the "twin switch" bit. A good opener and got the crowd going (about 160 fans). **

During the Battens' match, a black refrigerator sized box was hauled in with a label of SPECIAL DELIVERY for MR. WRESTLING II. This follows up an SCW angle that had been building for three weeks of a mystery man coming into take care of II once and for all. II comes out and tells Joe he's going to open the box and get the situation settled once and for all. He does and out flies Buck Robley (who must be at least 55 years old and is the booker for SCW) and attacks two with a "loaded glove" and slams him on the floor. II juiced fairly heavily in the chest. Finley and Pritchard try to save and are, of course, no help. The attack continued into the commercial and finally, some of the faces come and carry II out.

This really wasn't over as well as it might have been with II because most of the fans didn't know who Robley was and they were spending more time trying to figure out his identity than getting hot over the attack. Also, a number of the station's advertisers had been provided tickets for their families and many were non-wrestling fans. One lady in front of us said, "Yeah, we had an Atlanta cop in the ring and he didn't do anything to stop it."

2. TOMMY RICH vs. JOEY MAGGS. This match indicated how Tommy often is only a shell of his former self when he's in a squash. Maggs actually had a little support from the Gilbert angle on the Fox show the night before. Mostly restholds early on. Tommy did a suplex at 2:30.... more restholds.... then Tommy used his flying tackle for the pin at 4:06. Little heat in this one. DUD.

After another break, Gilbert and Dangerously come out and Paul E. demands Rich to come to the table. It was hard to hear in the studio because they had no p.a. system to hear the over-the-air interviews. At first Paul E. was trying to get Tommy to team up with Eddie. Tommy refused. So Paul E. proposes Eddie and Tommy wrestle each other and if Tommy loses, he'll never wrestle again anywhere. Tommy agrees to set up the evening's final match.

3. RANDY ROSE & JOEL DEATON vs. CHIC DONOVAN & MIGHTY IGOR. Randy carried this one but seemed to be mostly going through the motions. His running commentary with the fans was better. At one point, Rose made a move on Boni Blackstone and chased her out of the studio. Donovan looked unusually bad in this one. Rose scored the pin at 6:48 with a knee to the back of Igor and a jump from the second rope. As he left the studio, Rose said, "Let me show you my imitation of Boni Blackstone and Rhubarb Jones." He then gave a Jimmy Carter grin into the camera. *1/4

4. MR. BIG vs. RICKI STARR & TIM ANDERSON. This was the worst match of any kind I've seen this year. Jerry Blackwell did the worst job of trying to sell these two bums as actually doing damage to him for three minutes. Nobody bought it. After basically rolling against the ropes and on the mat for three minutes, Blackwell made a miraculous recovery and splashed Starr for the pin at 3:20. Once when Blackwell tried to get up, some fan yelled, "Anybody got a crane?" -(negative)**

5. RUFUS R. JONES & RANGER ROSS vs. SOLDAD USTINOV & NICK BUSICH. Busich drew a lot of "USA...USA" heat from the crowd but makes the worst-looking Russian I've ever seen. Mostly walking around and Rufus twisting his hips outside the ring for the first four minutes. Ranger tried hard to sell Ustinov's bearhug for about three minutes but it went too long. Ustinov's best move was when he spit on the fans at 8:00. At 9:40, Ranger was tossed out and thrown into Joe's TV monitor. Busich finally drew a DQ at 10:30 with the wimpiest hitting of a ref I've ever seen. Even with Busich's working the crowd this was a DUD. Rufus was in for 1:16.

After this we had a live phone beeper between Stewart and The Bullet (Bob Armstrong) to set up a match between Bullet and Robley in Marietta the next night as revenge for II's attack. We were told II was "at the hospital."

6. MANNY FERNANDEZ vs. BIG JIM BRYANT. I've always liked Manny as a worker but after the first minute and a half, he looked like he could hardly go. Bryant spent two-thirds of the match on the mat and I'm not even sure Ronnie Garvin could make him look good as a jobber. Manny had a section of fans and kept a running comedy act going with some guy with a Magnum T.A. t-shirt on. The guy said, "You look like you've got a guacamole in your drawers." Manny almost split his side laughing and this was during the match. Mostly restholds. Manny mercifully pinned this guy with a flying burrito at 10:13. 1/2* for Manny's comedy.

At this point, the show appeared to be over as it was 10:00 but Stewart came out and said WATL general manager John Serrao "has phoned and authorized the program to be extended to allow Eddie Gilbert and Tommy Rich go at it." Dangerously pledged to stay at the announcer's table and not interfere. Tommy tried to get the Atlanta cop to handcuff Paul E. but it didn't happen.

7. TOMMY RICH vs. EDDIE GILBERT. This was worth the trip. Tommy was a complete turnaround from his squash match and perhaps he was saving himself for this. In the first three minutes, he looked like the Rich of 1981, partially because Gilbert was selling like crazy. At 3:30, Tommy applied a sleeper which Eddie escaped a minute later. Gilbert really worked the crowd and caught Tommy in a neckbreaker at 7:30. Rich recovered and reapplied the sleeper at 8:10. We had already had about six two-counts in the match at this point. With the sleeper on, Eddie managed to shove Tommy off into the ref. With the ref down, Tommy tossed Eddie over the top rope and

Eddie took a nasty bump onto the floor (which wasn't padded). Tommy then slammed Eddie on the concrete when Dangerously finally leaves the table and conks Tommy with his telephone. Both guys are down but Tommy recovers first and throws Gilbert back in and is getting ready to go in for the kill when Dick Slater shows up and jumps Tommy from behind and elbows him about three times. The ref signals for a DQ...but then, inexplicably, Slater decks Gilbert, too, and proceeds to batter Eddie. Then Fernandez comes out and together, they double piledrive Gilbert. The fans are going nuts and as far as they are concerned Eddie has been "turned." Tommy begins to revive and the fans and Dangerously are both screaming for Tommy to help Eddie. Tommy thinks it over, Dangerously is screaming worse than Roddy Piper for help and finally all the babyfaces come out to cart Gilbert out of the ring.

We're still not sure if this was supposed to happen. After the show was over and most of the audience was gone, Joe said, "I still can't believe what Slater did...I can understand him jumping Tommy, but I don't know what he was thinking about when he hit Eddie. In fact, Gilbert got up real quickly after Slater decked him and yelled, "Boy, what's wrong with you? Don't you know who you're supposed to hit?" It didn't make sense because Gilbert is going to continue to be a heel with Continental and with WATL also carrying Continental shows, this kind of angle didn't make a lot of sense, but it sure did get the crowd hot. Definitely a **** match.

This would have been the second time in a month Slater pulled this kind of shenanigans and the last time got him in legit trouble with Robley. He came out and attacked Rich and Oates and Hoss Deaton during a tag match about three weeks ago.

All in all, it was a fun night and I think Joe is probably going to start going live from the studio on a regular basis soon.

OTHER NEWS

NWA---The big news this week is Powers of Pain resigned to go to the WWF. They refused to do the scaffold matches with the Road Warriors at the Bashes, so Dusty forced them out. So now, their spot on the scaffolds will be taken by Ivan Koloff and The Angel of Death, who is detouring from his plans to go to Calgary. This won't go over at all. The Angel is about as bad to watch as Ox Baker.

The 7/31 Bash card in Detroit features as a main event (get this): Kevin Sullivan & Dick Murdoch vs. Dusty and The Sheik (Ed Farhat). Yes, THE Sheik who was a major heel in the sixties in the Detroit and upper Midwest area and is now about 62 years old. I don't believe this, but they have actually been talking about bringing in Dick the Bruiser for their Indianapolis bash and possibly one with The Crusher. And the NWA front office guys think this is going to be great stuff. Maybe they'll bring back Sputnik Monroe for one of the Florida Bashes.

The Flair-Luger title match will be over big for 7/10 and probably the only thing that may hurt the pay-per-view now is if too many people spend even bigger PPV bucks on the Tyson-Spinks fight. They did one of their make-em-mad routines this week on World Wide by having Lex and Barry go at it in an announced 45-minute time limit match with only five minutes left in the show time.

CONTINENTAL---This group drew 2,700 for its last TV taping in Montgomery, the biggest crowd since a Flair-Wendell Cooley match two years ago. Steve Armstrong is back in with Tracy Smothers and Brother Ernest Angel showed up this past week with Sika and his legit nephew Samu. Last week's TV was one of the best-produced since Eddie's first show as booker.

USA---Fuller hat a hot show this past week, headlined by a *** match between Terry Gordy and Doug Furnas, with Gordy's selling making Furnas look good. Gordy won on a countout by suplexing Furnas outside the ring. Buddy Landell, who just lost the Tennessee title to Cooley, attacked Cooley after his squash match. This sets up at TV match for the title next week between Cooley and Landell. Tommy Rich was in for a "pre-taped" interview when he was jumped by Bill Dundee and the RPMs. Tommy's had it rough lately, hasn't he? This group really has a nice looking TV show.

WWF---Nobody really knows how Vince will use Barbarian-Warlord. One possibility has been offered that Demolition may turn and feud with them. Makes sense, except they were planning a Demolition-Hart Foundation feud. Bubba Rogers made his debut as Big Bossman on SUPERSTARS Saturday. It's a much funnier routine than him coming out in his suit and suspenders. But this will probably tick off a number of Atlantans by making fun of prison wardens. He comes out in a prison outfit and his hair is in a crewcut now. The new announcer in the WWF "events center," Sean Mooney, is a dud. No emotion at all. Vince ought to hire Jim Ross if they'd use him on play-by-play.

WORLD CLASS---This show is beginning to look stale in a hurry and it's too bad for such a good talent as Michael Hayes. Now that he no longer is booker, he seems to be regressing to "one of the boys." The group has really been hurt by the losses of Terry Taylor and Chris Adams. Seeing Michael and Kerry team against Iceman Parsons and Buddy Roberts Saturday seemed like a renovation of what this group was doing in 1984-85. A bizarre rumor has Michael attempting to make peace with the NWA and at the rate things are going, there may be room for him soon. Using Terry Gordy as a tag partner of Shaun Simpson is another waste.

INTERNATIONAL WORLD ALL-STAR WRESTLING---So you've never heard of this bunch before, huh? This is the group which was wrestling at the Chickasaw Club in Columbus on Monday nights during winter. They have begun TV tapings on WMAZ in Macon on Fridays at Midnight. I saw their show this past Friday night and it was excruciating. The legendary Randy Hogan now has a brother, Ricky, and the two Hogans went against The Redneck and Fred Haney, Jr. (I never knew Fred Sr., to be honest). Rookie Sugar Ray Lloyd has left SCW to join this group and is "one-half of the International tag team champions." I'm told they'll promote mostly in Macon, Valdosta, Albany, possibly Columbus, and maybe Waycross. Can't wait.

SOME FINAL NOTES: Warlord & Barbarian started Saturday night for Vince and will work as babyfaces. They'll feud with Demolition (who knows what they'll do with Hart-Neidhart now?) and be "managed" by Tito Santana as revenge for Demolition "injuring" Rick Martel.... SCW has its first live card in Columbus Saturday night.... Austin Idol-Eddie Gilbert packed the house in Montgomery Sunday night.... Meltzer and I talked Sunday night and he believes Slater deliberately tried to show up Gilbert in Atlanta Saturday night because the show was on live TV and nobody could edit it. He says that's why most promoters won't do live TV shows now because they've been burned by a few guys before---still no sense for the angle.... Angel of Death already on TBS Saturday and Paul Jones was really burying Warlord/Barbarian as cowards.... At least five guys will be altered from the original lineup set for Monday night's NWA card in Montgomery: Ricky Santana, Johnny Ace, The Terminator, and Powers of Pain were also scheduled on that card.... I just scanned two hours of tape from Mexico. You haven't missed much. Eighty per cent of the guys wear masks and you can't get into their identities with so many just alike.... Last up: you guys getting this monumental publication remember I need your $5 prior to August 1 so I can keep sending to you for August and September. I'll report on Monday night's NWA Montgomery show next week. Have a good week, SB!!!

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